

MARATHAS IN THE SUBA OF LAHORE

V.S. Kadam

The aim of the paper is to study the entry of the Maratha army in the Mughal *suba* of Lahore or what the Marathas called the *prant* of Lahore in the eighteenth century. The paper is mainly based on sixteen contemporary Marathi published letters, in addition to the Marathi translation of *Ahadnama*, a Persian source. Chronologically the paper covers a period of about three years, from 1 October, 1757 to 11 April, 1760. In addition to the presence of the Marathas in the *suba* the causes and the consequences of their entry in the Mughal *suba* of Lahore need to be analysed.

Why did the Marathas go north of Delhi and enter the *suba* of Lahore? The answer to this question has been given by two great historians: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and G.S. Sardesai. Both of them have held Raghunathrav, brother of Peshva Balaji Bajirav, personally responsible for this adventure. Sir Jadunath says that "their (Raghunathrav and Malharav Holkar) success in taking away Najib's *jagir* of Saharanpur emboldened them to talk of advance into Lahore and wresting that province from Abdali's son".¹ G.S. Sardesai comments that Raghunathrav committed the blunder, in taking upon himself the courage of going beyond Delhi.² Both the historians regard the entry of the Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore as unofficial, and without the permission of the Mughal emperor and Peshva Balaji Bajirav.

It would be necessary to examine these factors by Sir Jadunath Sarkar and G.S. Sardesai.

V.K. Rajvade has edited and published an undated agreement³ between the Mughal emperor on the one hand and the Peshva Balaji Bajirav's sardars, Malharav Holkar and Jayajirav Sinde on the other. The *Ahadnama* was most probably written in Persian, and V.K. Rajvade has published its eighteenth-century Marathi version, which contains many Persian words, while verbs are in Marathi. Rajvade has given the twentieth-century Marathi version of the agreement. Rajvade gives 1750 A.D. as the year of *Ahadnama*, when Ahmadshah was the Mughal emperor. The *Ahadnama* was issued sometime before 25 July, 1755, the day on which Jayajirav Sinde was murdered by the envoys of Bijay Singh; the Rathor ruler of Nagor.⁴

The *Ahadnama* is in the form of request (*arzi*) of Malharav and Jayajirav and the reply by the Mughal emperor. While Balaji Bajirav

has not been referred to as the Peshva, there is no mention whatsoever of the Chatrapati. Perhaps to keep out the Chatrapati, the Maratha King, from the agreement, Balaji Bajirav has not been referred to as the Peshva, a servant and minister of the Chatrapati. Of the Sardars, Jayajirav Sinde has been especially mentioned as the friend of Padshah and a prominent brave. Though Malharav was senior, Jayppa or Jayajirav Sinde (alongwith his brothers) was in ascendance.

The ostensible reason for the agreement seems to be the imminent threat of Ahmad Shah Abdali to the Mughal empire. Abdali is thrice referred to in the *Ahadnama*. The two Maratha *sardars* acknowledged in the *Ahadnama* the receipt of a sum of rupees thirty hundred thousand (thirty lac), out of the total of rupees fifty lac, for the chastisement (*tambih*)⁵ of Abdali.

Both the *sardars* were given the rights, to collect one fourth of the revenue (*chauth*) from various Mughal *subas*, including the *subas* of Multan, Lahore and Thatta, by the *Ahadnama*.

Avadhutrav Keshav, a news writer, writing from north India (Hindustan), on 1 October, 1757, notes that the *suba* of Lahore has been given (*didhala*) to the Peshava.⁶ This letter of Avadhutrav Keshav, therefore, corroborates the grant of the *suba* of Lahore, as laid down in the *Ahadnama*.

In view of this, it would be necessary to revise the view of Sir Jadunath and G.S. Sardesai that the entry of the Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore was unofficial. As a matter of fact it was officially agreed to by both the governments at Delhi and Pune.

Moreover, the view of Sir Jadunath and G.S. Sardesai that Raghunathrav was personally responsible for the entry of the Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore cannot be accepted. If anyone was personally responsible for the entry of the Marathas especially in the year 1758, it was the Peshva himself.

Four letters, two written by Peshva Balaji Bajirav and two received by him, can be taken into consideration, to understand the role of the Peshva and his very keen desire to gain large amounts of money to repay his loan, for the entry of the Maratha army in the *suba* of Lahore.

In the report⁷ to Peshva Balaji Bajirav, sent from Lahore on 4 May, 1758 by Raghunathrav the very first sentence quotes the order of Balaji Bajirav that Raghunathrav should establish control over the *subas* south of Atak including Lahore, Multan and Kashmir. In reply Raghunathrav, writes that he has established Maratha control in some of the places suggested by the Peshva and the remaining

area would also be brought under control.

Balaji Bajirav in his letter,⁸ dated 7 November, 1758, to Ramrav Nilkanth, the agent (*vakil*) of sardar Sinde, writes that as Dattaji and Janakoji Sinde had gained control over Lahore, they should thereafter proceed to Atak and to do all that was necessary to gain money. At the end of the letter, the Peshva writes that Dattaji Sinde would be concerned about the Peshva's debt.⁹

Balaji Bajirav in his letter,¹⁰ written to Dattaji and Janakoji Sinde on 21 March 1759, which is in the form of a reply to their letter, tries to impress upon both of them the need to repay the Peshva's loan. To make their assurance doubly sure, the Peshva repeated the assurance of Dattaji and Janakoji Sinde that after their return from Lahore, they would repay the debt of the Peshva government.

Balaji Bajirav in his letter¹¹ to Ramaji Anant dated 24 December 1759 informs him that he (Ramaji) alongwith Dattaba and Janakoji Sinde should try to secure Lahore, Bengal and Patana. In addition, they should also acquire Kashi, Ayodhya and Prayag.

The oft-repeated words in the letter are gain large amounts of money (*matabar paika melvava*). It was suggested that the amount from Lahore should be brought and sent to the Peshva this year.

II

Sir Jadunath Sarkar gives February 1758 as the month and year in which the Maratha invasion of the Panjab began.¹² However a contemporary Marathi letter gives an earlier date, preceding Sir Jadunath's date by about six months.

Avadhutrav Keshav, a news writer from north India (Hindustan) reported on 1 October 1757 that Raghunathrav had given a contingent of 15,000 cavarly to Antaji Manakeshvar, who was attacking the outposts of the Pathans in the *suba* of Lahore and raising the Maratha outposts in their place.¹³

By April 1758, the Maratha army was camped at Lahore. Hari Ragaunath Bhide, a Brahman reporter of the Peshva, in a letter¹⁴ written from Lahore, on the bank of Iravati river to Nana Phadnis on 21 April, 1758 comments that the army from the south, which had so far not crossed Delhi, reached the Chinab river. Moreover, Hari gives an account of the activities of the Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore. Hari writes that Raghunathrav, after defeating Abdul Samad Khan in the 'Sarhad', transferred the Sarhad *prant* and the Doab to Adinabeg Mogal, after having fixed the tribute (*khandani*).¹⁵

Raghunathrav, thereafter, sent contingents without artillery (*sadya fouja*) under Manaji Paygude, Gangadhar Bajirav and Govindrav Ganesh Barve against the forces of Ahmad Shah Abdali. The three Maratha contingents attacked Jahan Khan and Taimur Shah, son of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Both of them ran away leaving behind baggage (*bunage*) and artillery (*topha-khana*). The Maratha forces pursued the Afghan army upto Chinab river, which was in flood. If Chinab were not in flood, Hari wrties, the Marathas would have reached Atak. The *sahat*, however, crossed the Atak. The word *sahat* here doesn't make any sense; the word might be *kahat*, meaning fearless or reckless. As it was cumbersome of the Marathas to cross the river with the help of bridge (of boats), the three contingents returned to the base camp.¹⁶

Raghunathrav, while at Lahore settled¹⁷ the application of Bibi Rahima, who claimed that Nawab Mansur Ali and the Vazir had given to her in grant a share of six annas (37.5%) out of the excise and tolls (*sayar*) of the pargana of Lahore. She pleaded that this right of hers, which had fallen in disuse might please be continued.

Raghoba in his order (*sanad*) to the head collector of revenue of the district (*kamavisdar* of *pargana*) Phuphund in *prant* Antarved, dated 1 May 1758, bestowed the lapsed right on Bibi Rahima.¹⁸

Moreover, Raghunathrav laid down the policy of Pune government in north India that only the rights and practices prevalent under the Mughal empire be continued.¹⁹

Raghunathrav in his report²⁰ of 4 May 1758 to his brother and Peshva Balaji Bajirav, expressed his perception of the Iranian angle of the Abdali problem. Raghunathrav wrote about the defeat of the Afghan forces, led by Ahmad Shah Abdali by the Iranian (Persian) forces, which pursued them upto Qandhahar. The Padshah of Iran wrote letters to Raghunathrav and Malharrav Holkar, advising both of them to come over to Qandhahar to defeat Abdali and that Atak could be border between them. (i.e. Iranians and the Marathas). Raghunathrav in his report to the Peshva shows his disinclination to accept the Iranian proposal. He wrote to the Peshva that Kabul and Qandhahar the two provinces north to Atak were with Hindustan from Akbar to Aurangzeb. Why then these two provinces be given over to Iran?²¹

Raghunathrav was reiterating the policy of the Pune government of continuing the political and administrative practices prevalent in the Mughal Empire. Moreover, his perception of the political boundaries of 'Hindustan' in the northeast, was determined by the

perception of the Mughal emperors.

By the beginning of the year 1759, Dattaji, and Janakoji were stationed at Lahore, as it seems clear from a letter,²² written on 21 March 1759 by Peshva Balaji Bajirav to them. Moreover, from another letter²³ of the Peshva dated 2 May 1759, written to Ramaji Anant, a servant of the Shinde *sardar*, it seems that Dattaji and Janakoji were still busy with the affairs of the *suba* of Lahore.

Janakoji had put Sabaji Patil in charge of the *suba* of Lahore. Janakoji, however, recalled Sabaji Patil and ordered Naro Shankar to take the charge of the *suba* of Lahore. This change of officials might have occurred by April 1759, as it has been reported by Bal Govind from Delhi to Raghunathrav in his letter²⁴ of 3 May, 1759.

Janakoji Shinde, in the letter²⁵ of 15 May 1759 communicated to Peshva Balaji Bajirav that he had sent a supplementary letter elaborating the developments in the *suba* of Lahore. This supplementary letter is not available, and if traced could throw light on the activities of Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore under Janakoji Shinde.

Barring one letter, the Marathi sources are silent about the policy and actions of the Sikhs, the inhabitants of the *suba* during the three years (1757-60) of our study. The exceptional contemporary Marathi letter²⁶ dated 24 November, 1759 has been written by Govindpant Bundeale to Trimbakpant (Pethe ?) and Janardhanpant. In the letter Govindpant communicates the arrival of Ahmad Shah Abdali in the *suba* of Lahore. He was given hot welcome by the Sikhs, who fought a stiff battle with the Pathans, in which two thousand Pathans were killed and Jahan Khan was wounded. The battle has not been referred to by Grant-Duff in his *History of the Marhattas* nor by the author of *Bhausahabaci Bakhar*. Sir Jadunath writes about "the Afghan invaders having taken possession of the entire Panjab upto Sarhind and of the Marathas having everywhere fled away before them without striking a blow".²⁷ Yet he too has not written about this battle of November 1759 between Abdali and the Sikhs.

The sources, even in Marathi, to study the various aspects of the Maratha presence in the *suba* of Lahore, are not sufficient, and we therefore do not get a clear picture of the Maratha activities in the *suba* of Lahore.

If we accept *Ahadnama* and the corroborative Marathi letter of Avadhutrav Keshav of 1 October 1757, the entry of Marathas in the *suba* of Lahore becomes official and a part of the great plan to protect and to maintain the Mughal empire accepted by Jayajirav Shinde

and Malharav Holkar, two *sardars* of the Peshva government at Pune. Both of them, according to *Ahadnama*, received rights to collect chauth in the *suba* of Lahore, and other *subas* of the Mughal empire. The regular incursions of Ahmadshah Abdali forced the hands of the government of the Mughal empire and the Maratha power was regarded by them as competent to meet the Afghan invader.

The Peshva's power, however had logistic and financial problems, in addition to the hostile political situation in the *suba* of Lahore.

The shortest route between Pune in Maharashtra and Lahore in the Panjab in the eighteenth century was through the present states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan covering a distance of 2267 kms. The Marathas army had to cross two mountain ranges of Satmala and Satpura. In addition they had to cross eight river valleys to reach Lahore: Godavari, Tapti and Narmada in Maharashtra; Mandoi, Mahi and Chambal in Madhya Pradesh; Luni in Rajasthan; Satlaj and Bias in the Panjab. In order to proceed from Lahore to Atak, the Maratha army had to cross the ninth river valley of Chinab.

The mountain ranges, the river valleys and the long distance were the physical aspects which determined the nature of Maratha army, marching without heavy baggage and artillery. Moreover in case of a crisis in north India, it was difficult to send succour at a short notice from south Maharashtra, the main recruiting ground of the Marathas.

Compared to Pune of the Peshvas, Ujjain of the Shindes was more centrally located. And the military competence of Ranoji Shinde and his sons was far superior than that of the Peshvas and their other *sardars*.

The difficulties of Maratha soldiers in far-away *suba* of Lahore, full of strong and lawless landholders (*zamindars*) were made clear by the contemporary persons involved in the military exercise. Even a letter sent from north India would take more than two months to reach Pune. Peshva Balaji Bajirav in his letter²⁸ of 11 April 1760, while acknowledging the receipt of Govind Ballal's (probably Bunde) letter, communicated that he (the Peshva) received Govind Ballal's letter, two months and five days, after its dispatch.

Hari Raghunath Bhinde in his newsletter²⁹ of 21 April 1758 to Nana Phadnis has hinted at the difficulty of the Maratha soldiers camping far away from homeland and the reluctance of the Maratha soldiers to stay in such camps. Moreover due to long forays, the Maratha soldiers were put to extreme strain.³⁰

The condition in the *suba* of Lahore was made clear to Peshva Balaji Bajirav by his brother Raghunathrav in his report³¹ of 4 May 1758. Though the revenue (*vasuli* Of the *suba* was between two and four crores, Raghunathrav reported, the actual income (*khandani*) was limited. The lawless and powerful *zamindars* in the *suba* (*zamindar mavas, mothe mothe ahet*) were not willing to give the Marathas their share of the revenue. Moreover Raghunathrav reported that in view the expenditure of the campaign and camping (*sibandi*) in the region, Raghunathrav indirectly hinted, that it would not be possible to send any money to Pune, from the *suba*.³²

By the end of July 1758, Raghunathrav reached Jaynagar *prant* from the *suba* of Lahore.³³ Thereafter, Peshva Balaji Bajirav started writing letters to the agent of Shinde and to the Shinde themselves.

On 7 November 1758, Peshva Balaji Bajirav wrote a letter to Ramrav Nilkanth, the agent of the Shinde sardars. In this letter,³⁴ the Peshva suggested to the Shindes two alternatives in what he called a political plan (*Rajaki mansuba*). The Peshva advised either to liberate Patna and to gain money or to proceed upto Atak, as control had been established over the Lahore *prant*, and to do all that was necessary to gain money.³⁵

Peshva Balaji Bajirav's Brahman Sardar, Antaji Manekesvar, requested the Pune government in September 1758 to send a letter of instruction (*takidpatra*) to Janakoji Shinde asking him to proceed to Delhi and to destroy the Rohilla forces and also to personally make the *bandobast* of the *suba* of Lahore.³⁶ The confidants of the Peshva like Antaji Manakeshvar were giving impractical advice to the Peshva, that Janakoji should fight on both the Delhi and Lahore fronts.

Traditionally, the Maratha soldiers returned to their villages for the cultivation of their lands from outside Maharashtra; they were reluctant to camp outside Maharashtra in the monsoon.³⁷ The same practice continued in the eighteenth century. It was possible that the political gains made in the rest of the year could be lost in the monsoon due to the return of Maratha soldiers to their homes. The *suba* of Lahore in the eighteenth century was no exception.

While Antaji Manakeshvar in 1758 suggested to Raghunathrav the necessity of camping in the *suba* of Lahore, Peshva Balaji Bajirao in 1759 wanted Dattaji and Janakoji to leave the *suba* of Lahore and to camp near Delhi.

Antaji Manakeshvar, in his letter³⁸ of 5 May 1758 to Raghunathrav congratulate him for the defeat of the Pathans and

acquisition of Lahore. Antaji at the end of the letter mildly warns Raghunathrav that if he did not camp in the *suba* of Lahore the Pathans would reach the Lahore *prant* in the rainy season.³⁹

Dattaji Shinde and Janakoji Shinde had gone to Lahore in the early part of 1759. Peshva Balaji Bajirav wanted that they should make well-order-condition (*bandobast*) of Lahore and should proceed to Delhi for the camp. The Peshva wrote a letter⁴⁰ to this effect to both Dattaji and Janakoji on 21 March, 1759.

He wanted both the Shindes to proceed to Delhi to acquire Kashi, Prayag, Bengal, Patna, in addition to large amount of money⁴¹ to be sent to Pune.

Unlike his father Bajirav First Peshva Balaji Bajirav had no inclination towards military profession. Neither did he try to gain knowledge about the geo-political complexity of the vast north India, by accompanying the Maratha army in the campaign.

Balaji Bajirav through his long letters was pestering Dattaji and Janakoji Shinde to acquire territories in the Panjab, Bengal and Bihar, in addition to goading them to acquire Kashi, Ayodhya and Prayag, the holy places of Hindus. He also wanted them to send large (*matarbar*) amounts of money from north India, to repay his loans. Politics is the art of possible in a given time frame. By asking the Maratha sardars to be almost everywhere in north India Peshva Balaji Bajirav was in reality asking them to be nowhere in north India. Due to his undesirable haste in suggesting the acquisition of different territories in north India, the Peshva was ignoring the real and immediate threat of Ahmad Shah Abdali to the Maratha power.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (hereafter *Fall*), Vol.II, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1971, p.49.
2. G.S. Sardesai, *Marathi Riyasat* Vol.IV Mumbai; Popular; 1990, p.530.
3. V.K. Rajvade ed., *Marathyancya Itihasaci Sadhane*, (hereafter *MIS*) Vol.I Wai, 1898, No.1 undated.
4. *Fall*, II, pp.126-7.
5. Tambih (A) - Chastisement, correction, beating Molesworth Reprint (1986), p.367.
6. *MIS*, I, 100, pp.174-5 dated 1.10.1757.
7. G.S. Sardesai ed., *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* (hereinafter *SPD*) Vol.II, No.98 dated 7 November 1758.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*.
10. G.S. Sardesai, Y.M. Kale and V.S. Vakaskar ed. *Kavyetihās - Sangrahat Prasiddha*

Jhalele Aitihāsik Patre Yadi Vagaire Lekh (hereafter *KSPY*), No.167, p.156 dated 21 March, 1759.

11. *KSPY*, No.166, pp.154-5 dated 24 December, 1759.
12. *Fall*, II, p.50.
13. *MIS*, Vol.I, No.100, pp.174-5 dated 1 November 1757.
14. *SPD*, Vol.XXVII, No.218 dated 21 April 1758.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *MIS*, Vol.I, No.124, dated 1 May 1758.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. V.K. Rajvade ed., *Aitihāsik Sphut Lekh* Place Not Given, 1915, Vol.IV, No.11 dated 4 May 1758.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *KSPY* No.167, p.156 dated 21 March, 1759.
23. *KSPY* No.171, p.161 dated 2 May, 1759.
24. *SPD*, Vol.II, No.100 dated 3 May, 1759.
25. *SPD*, Vol.II, No.101 dated 15 May, 1759.
26. *MIS*, Vol.I, No.146 dated 24 November, 1759.
27. *Fall*, II, p.148.
28. *MIS*, Vol.I, No.172 dated 11 April, 1760.
29. *Aitihāsik Sphut Lekh*, Vol.IV, No.11 dated 21 April, 1758.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.* See also *SPD* Vol.XXI, No.163 dated 5 September 1758. This is a letter written by Raja Keshavrav to the Peshva regarding the acquisition of the *suba* of Lahore worth two crores by the Peshva.
33. *SPD*, Vol.XXVII, No.227, dated 24 July, 1758.
34. *SPD*, Vol.II, No.98, dated 7 November, 1758.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *SPD*, Vol.XXVII, No.231. September, 1758 (no date).
37. Even Nizam-ul-Mulk advised Nasar Jang, on 21 May, 1748 to remain at one place during the monsoon, because of the severe strain to men and animals, if army movement were undertaken. During the rest of the year he (Nasar Jang) should be constantly on the move (*musahiri*). See *KSPY* No.63 dated 21 May, 1758.
38. *KSPY* No.162 dated 5 May 1758.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *KSPY* No.167 dated 21 March, 1759.
41. *Ibid.*

Documents used: Seventeen

MIS, Nos.1, 100, 124, 146 and 172.

KSSPY Nos.63, 162, 166, 167 and 171

SPD, II Nos.98, 100 and 101.

SPD, XXI No.163.

SPD, XXVII Nos.218, 227 and 231.